

THE CHAIRMAN: The Committee Chairman will be permitted to make a very brief presentation concerning the whole article, simply so that we will know what it covers in general, and then proceed to a discussion of section 1, after which there will be a Committee presentation with respect to each section.

DELEGATE KOSS: We have devoted considerable time here to debating which branches of our government should be elected and the manner in which such an election should be held. We now have before us consideration of the constitutional provisions that would establish who, indeed, should be entitled to vote in those elections.

Insofar as the elective process is held in a free and open manner, this is the whole core of the democratic process. The importance of the provisions of the Recommendation before you cannot be minimized.

Generally, the Committee felt that the right to vote is so fundamental to the democratic process that it should be limited only under circumstances when such limitation can be justified by the presence of some handicap that might invalidate the integrity of the electoral process.

The present constitutional provisions for eligibility in the Maryland Constitution are tied to three factors: United States citizenship, age, and residence.

The Constitution of 1776 established those who were eligible to vote as a free men above twenty-one having a freehold hold of 50 acres, or having property above the value of thirty pounds. Prior to the adoption of our first Constitution, Maryland and New Jersey were the only two colonies that had no language in their election laws specifying the age of twenty-one.

The Committee recommends that the voting age be established at nineteen. To reiterate the language of our memorandum, the Committee decided that persons who had reached this age were possessed of such information and responsibility that they might intelligently cast a vote. The Committee could not in good conscience impose any more stringent standards on the independence of this age-group in participating in election processes than is imposed on any other group.

The evidence presented to the Committee was most persuasive in its demonstration that our educational system has made a civic education an integral part of our state public school program. A greater percentage of our citizens now than ever

before continue their education through high school, and this certainly is a marked contrast to the generations that have preceded them.

Lastly, you cannot overlook the fact that a great number of our young people are expressing their real concern with the issues that are of concern to us all.

Now, you might be interested in knowing that the question of lowering the voting age in Maryland has not been confined to the time since 1940 or even to the 20th century. There was an attempt made in the 1851 Constitutional Convention to extend the franchise to married men of eighteen.

In the United States, Georgia was the first state to break the traditional twenty-one-year age limit. In 1943 Georgia lowered the age to eighteen, followed by Kentucky in 1955. Of the two newest states, Alaska set it at nineteen and Hawaii at twenty.

In Maryland we know that one municipality has already lowered the voting age to eighteen, and another one is considering that move.

Census publication on voter participation indicates that the lowest participation of any age group is that group from 21-24. It is difficult to analyze why this should be, but it has been suggested that the period of young adulthood is spent in a rather mobile manner, where the beginning of the career and family responsibility perhaps take the fore. It was the Committee's opinion if the voting habit could be established sooner after the previously mentioned civic education was received, this process would continue.

Most nineteen year olds are out of the household, either having joined the labor force or in college. In both of these roles they are assuming the responsibilities that we are wont to associate with adulthood.

In determining the question of voting age, it was not possible, nor did the Committee find it persuasive, to tie the age of voting to the age at which young people achieved legal status. There is no one consistent legal adult age; it varies for various purposes, and indeed, in Maryland, it varies from one jurisdiction to another.

In addition, even adults who are given the vote now are protected by various laws from their own actions that are entered into freely and without limitation. The Committee decided that the issue of voting age should be decided on its own merit on an analysis of the role young people would play in the electoral process.